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MASKED BOB-WHITE (*COLINUS RIDGWAYI*).

BY HERBERT BROWN.

ONE OF the rare, if not the rarest, native birds in Arizona to-day is the Masked Bob-white (*Colinus ridgwayi*). It is not only rare in Arizona but also in the Mexican State of Sonora, the original habitat of the bird. For the past several years it has been safeguarded by law in this Territory, but unfortunately there are none left to protect.

I have been told by men who were familiar with the Sonoite and Santa Cruz valleys, in the early sixties, that these birds were then common thereabouts. I have also been told that "in early days" they were plentiful in Ramsey's Cañon in the Huachucas, and also on the Babacomori, a valley intervening between the Huachuca and Harshaw ranges. I remember hearing of them being there in 1881, but did not see them. Some ten years ago a market collector worked the Ramsey Cañon country and reported that he had not only taken the bird but an egg also. That he did these things I am extremely doubtful. To say positively that he did not would be to bump against a serious proposition, but he so warped the truth concerning other alleged remarkable finds that the late Major Bendire, one of the most honorable of men, upon the discovery of attempted fraud, refused further to examine material sent him by the party in question. I am, however, of the belief that these birds were in the cañon when white men first

entered that section of country, and it is possible that a few were still there on the discovery of the Tombstone and Harshaw mines, but if so they were speedily trodden out of existence by the inrush of fortune hunters. I mention this Ramsey Cañon business for the purpose of establishing the eastern boundary line of their former habitat in Arizona.

Prior to 1870, but just when I cannot now say, Major Bendire, then a Lieutenant of Cavalry, was stationed at Camp Buchannon, on the Sonoite, almost in the very heart of the country where the Bob-whites used to be, but, oddly enough, he did not see or hear them. At that time the valley was heavily grassed and the Apache Indians notoriously bad, a combination that prevented the most sanguine naturalist from getting too close to the ground without taking big chances of permanently slipping under it. For many years Indians, grass, and birds have been gone. The Santa Cruz, to the south and west of the Sonoite, is wider and was more heavily brushed. Those conditions gave the birds a better chance for life and for years they held tenaciously on. Six or seven years ago I was told by a ranchman, living near Calabasas, that a small bunch of Bob-white Quail had shortly before entered his barnyard and that he had killed six of them at one shot. It was a grievous thing to do, but the man did not know that he was wiping out of existence the last remnant of a native Arizona game bird. Later I heard of the remaining few having been occasionally seen, but for several years now no word has come of them.

I never found them west of the Baboquivari Mountains, and from my knowledge of the country thereabouts I am inclined to fix the eastern slope of that range as their western limit. Between that and Ramsey's Cañon, in the Huachucas, is a distance of nearly one hundred miles. Their deepest point of penetration into the Territory was probably not more than fifty miles, and that was down the Baboquavari or Altar valley.

In Sonora, Mexico, where I first met with the bird, it was known as *Perdice*, a name equally misapplied to *Cyrtonyx montezumæ*. Just why it, or in fact either of these birds, should have been so termed I do not know, but think it was probably a localism used by the rancheros to distinguish it from *Codornice*, by which two other species of quail were commonly known. It is not easy to

describe the feelings of myself and American companions when we first heard the call *bob white*. It was startling and unexpected, and that night nearly every man in camp had some reminiscence to tell of Bob-white and his boyhood days. Just that simple call made many a hardy man heart-sick and homesick. It was to us Americans the one homelike thing in all Sonora, and we felt thousands of miles nearer to our dear old homes in the then far distant States. The omnipresent hope of "striking it rich" has made life's burden light to many a weary man, and when the 'Perdice' made its sweet call only those who have been similarly circumstanced can appreciate it as we did. Then, though but a young man, I had spread my blankets over much of the frontier West, and no one felt that letter from home more than I did. This I know has but little to do with the subject at issue, but I wish to show my familiarity with the bird at the time its identity was later called into question. True, I believed it to be *Ortyx virginianus*, "the Bob-white of the States," the same bird I had known as a boy in West Virginia, and as such I called attention to its being in Arizona.

In the spring of 1884 a man by name of Andrews, then living in the foothills of the eastern slope of the Barboquivaris, brought me a pair of these quail to Tucson. As I was on the point of leaving town for a business trip through the Territory I took the birds to the office of a friend and he promised to make them up as best he could for me. I then wrote a note to 'The Citizen,' a newspaper with which I was connected, stating that a pair of Bob-white Quail had been brought in, and so on. This note was subsequently republished in 'Forest and Stream,' where it was seen by Mr. Robert Ridgway, of Washington. He replied that there was no such thing as a Bob-white in Arizona and that the writer of 'The Citizen' article had probably mistaken some other well known form of quail for them. On being advised of this by Dr. Geo. Bird Grinnell, editor of 'Forest and Stream,' I went to my friend for the skins he had promised to make for me. To my regret I learned that the birds had been allowed to spoil and were then thrown out. Fortunately, or rather unfortunately as it turned out afterwards, portions of the birds were still to be had. These, through the kindness of Dr. Grinnell, were sent to Mr. Ridgway

and were by him identified as *Ortyx graysoni*, a Mexican species found in the neighborhood of Mazatlan. He expressed surprise at the bird being in Arizona. For my own collection I at once procured another pair. These latter birds were seen, examined, and commented on by W. E. D. Scott, E. W. Nelson, F. Stephens, and H. W. Henshaw, none of whom, with the exception of Scott, questioned the correctness of Mr. Ridgway's identification. Scott's remark was, after he had examined the birds a number of times, "I think they ought to be further inquired into," or words to that effect. Stephens was then in the country collecting for Mr. Brewster, of Cambridge, Mass. When in Sonora, just south of the Arizona line, he killed a male. On his return to Tucson we compared it with my specimens and found it to be the same bird. Mr. Stephens did not see the fragmentary skins that were sent to Mr. Ridgway through Dr. Grinnell, as stated erroneously by Prof. J. A. Allen in his very excellent article on 'The Masked Bob-white of Arizona, and its Allies,'¹ but he saw and compared his bird with a pair of perfect skins then in possession of the writer. Later, Stephens sent his bird to Mr. Brewster, by whom it was described as a new bird and named in honor of Mr. Ridgway; hence we have *Colinus ridgwayi*.

It was never my good fortune to see an egg of this bird. When the late Major Bendire was stationed at Camp Buchannon, he found a broken shell of what he then judged to have been the egg of an *Ortyx*. The Ramsey Cañon collector, elsewhere referred to, claimed to have taken an egg from the body of the bird he said he had killed, but as his one story rests on no better foundation than the other it can be taken for what it is worth. About 1885, I think, I offered to Mexican vaqueros, riding the Sasabe Flat and Altar Valley ranges, one dollar per egg for the first nest of Bob-white eggs found for me. Word was subsequently sent to me that a nest containing six eggs had been found on the mesa near the mouth of Thomas Cañon, on the eastern side of the Baboquivari Mountains. Unfortunately these precious things were lost through the cupidity of the finders whose expectations ran to more eggs, but while waiting for the increase the nest was robbed of the eggs

¹ Bull. Am. Mus. Nat. Hist., Vol. I, No. 7, 1886, pp. 273-290.

that were then in it. I was, however, notified of the find, but when I reached there I found only an empty nest, a bowl-shaped depression in a bunch of mountain grass. I have regretted many times that I did not dig up the "situation" and take it home with me, but I did not then dream of their future rarity. The eggs had undoubtedly been taken by some reptile or animal, as no broken shells were found to indicate that they had hatched. Later I offered five dollars for the first egg of a Bob-white brought to me. I received a quail egg from a party by the name of Sturgis, then living at La Osa, a few miles north of the Mexican line. He claimed to have personally taken the egg from the nest and knew it to be that of a Bob-white. Although I had my misgivings I paid the money and then sent the egg to Major Bendire for examination. He reported it to be nothing more than a very pale egg of a *Callipella squamata*. I then wrote to friends in Sonora, but they never succeeded in getting me the much coveted egg.

The causes leading to the extermination of the Arizona Masked Bob-white (*Colinus ridgwayi*) are due to the overstocking of the country with cattle, supplemented by several rainless years. This combination practically stripped the country bare of vegetation. Of their range the *Colinus* occupied only certain restricted portions, and when their food and shelter had been trodden out of existence by thousands of hunger-dying stock, there was nothing left for poor little Bob-white to do but go out with them. As the conditions in Sonora were similar to those in Arizona, birds and cattle suffered in common. The Arizona Bob-white would have thriven well in an agricultural country, in brushy fence corners, tangled thickets and weed-covered fields, but such things were not to be had in their habitat. Unless a few can still be found on the upper Santa Cruz we can, in truth, bid them a final good-bye.